



The Middle East & North Africa "Gender and Development E-Brief"

Issue # 137
October 2013

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GENDER ACTIVISM

Vienna +20: Some Progress In MENA But Relativity Of Rights And Backlash Persist By Susan Tolmay



Photo credit: <http://iranian.com/>

In this latest interview forming part of AWID's commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, AWID speaks to Mahnaz Afkhami, Director of Women's Learning Partnership about some of the advances and challenges for women's rights and women's rights organizing in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region over the last 20 years

AWID: How far do you think we have come in the last 20 years in realizing universal human rights for women? What are some of the success stories for women in the MENA region from the past two decades?

Mahnaz Afkhami (MA): One of the most important achievements of the World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna Conference) was the formal global agreement that *women's rights are human rights* and that universal human rights supersede cultural values that might come into conflict with such rights.

Global gatherings such as the Vienna Conference, when successful, lead to paradigm change, which opens the way for other actions. The Vienna Conference made possible the creation of the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights, which then created the position of UN Rapporteur on Violence Against Women. The Conference helped refocus the mission of the UN around the centrality of human rights. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women adopted by the General Assembly two years after Vienna became a model and an inducement for national parliaments to legislate appropriate laws. The Conference support for Independent National Human Rights organizations helped them grow in number from 35 to 100.

The greatest achievement of the Conference was the consensus on the universal applicability of human rights. The institutions and instruments that grew out of the Vienna Conference have provided women with strong national and international vehicles to mobilize, organize, and advocate for rights, however, an enormous amount of work remains to be done to secure and ensure women's human rights.

In the MENA region, such global ideas as the universality of human rights have greatly contributed to the expansion of women's consciousness, especially the understanding that rights are integral to our self-definition as women and as human beings: That rights are inherent in our humanity, not in our membership in religion, race, culture or nationality. This consciousness provides the foundation around which solidarity and movement building takes place. It has come about through the work of courageous activists who face grave challenges, and through the expanding connectedness of the people of these countries--70% of whom



are below the age of thirty and who are increasingly adept at using modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) to connect to their peers across the world.

Movement building in the MENA has led to successful campaigns in several fields opening doors to future possibilities. An interesting and heart-warming example of sharing concepts and strategies across borders is the Moroccan family law. Decades of struggle made possible Morocco's landmark 2004 family code, which is a beacon for Muslim women's rights. It raised the age of marriage and gave wives joint responsibility and control with husbands in such family matters as property upon divorce. It also criminalized sexual harassment. These lobbying and advocacy processes were documented, translated and shared internationally. In 2006, using similar strategies, Iranian women's rights activists began their extraordinary One Million Signatures Campaign *for the Reform of Family Laws*; a model of door to door campaigning, social networking, and communicating that mobilized an astonishing 30% share of signatures by men. This networking and movement building was one of the main forces behind the 2009 Green Movement in Iran that although suppressed, remains an experience that will continue to impact the process of democracy development in Iran.

There are other examples of important successes in other countries--many of which relate to the citizenship campaign spearheaded by Lebanon--which expands the advocacy for women's nationality rights by linking it to the rights and responsibilities of the individual citizen, male or female, vis-à-vis the state. This provides a good frame for the debate about rights, which will bring in women's role in movements for democracy and the significance of their partnership with men in achieving equality and rights for all.

<http://www.awid.org/News-Analysis/Friday-Files/Vienna-20-Some-Progress-in-MENA-but-Relativity-of-Rights-and-Backlash-Persist>

Saudi Arabia: Women Activists' Sentences Confirmed

An appeal court in Dammam has confirmed the sentences of two women's rights activists convicted in an unfair trial for attempting to help an abused woman. Wajeha al-Huwaider and Fawzia al-Oyouni were sentenced to 10 months in prison followed by a two-year travel ban.

On 24 September 2013, an appeal court in the city of Dammam confirmed the 15 June conviction of two prominent Saudi Arabian women's rights activists by the criminal court in the city of al-Khobar and upheld their sentences of 10 months in prison followed by a two-year travel ban. The activists were convicted of the Shari'a offence of *takhib* (inciting a woman to defy her husband's authority), specifically inciting a Canadian woman to separate from her Saudi Arabian husband.

Wajeha al-Huwaider and Fawzia al-Oyouni were arrested on 6 June 2011 when attempting to come to the aid of the Canadian woman, after they received a text message from her telling them that her husband had left her and her children were locked in the house with no food whilst he travelled for five days. On their way to the house, the two activists were ambushed by security forces, accompanied by the husband, and arrested. Although the husband did not file a lawsuit against them, the prosecution accused them of attempting to kidnap the woman and her children and take them to the Canadian embassy.

Their trial before the criminal court in al-Khobar was marred by a number of irregularities. After the two activists requested that the woman they were accused of kidnapping testify in court, the judge replaced the



charge of kidnapping by *takhib*. The judge denied their request to call her as a witness and proceeded to convict and sentence them even though the alleged victim herself had appeared on social media denying the allegations against the two activists. *Takhib* is not a recognizable criminal offence under international standards. Both women were prevented from foreign travel before their sentences were finalized and are due to begin serving their sentences immediately.

<http://www.awid.org/Get-Involved/Urgent-Actions3/Saudi-Arabia-Women-activists-sentences-confirmed>

Undertake critical reforms to improve Lebanon's fiscal stability, create unemployment, provide adequate infrastructure, and support social inclusion

Social Protection: Under the *Emergency Social Protection Implementation Support Project* (Lebanon Trust Fund - Bank Approval: September 5, 2008; Closing: August 31, 2014), the National Poverty Targeting Program promotes gender equality with a goal of ensuring that 50 percent of all beneficiaries are women. In the first round, out of 84,322 total beneficiaries, 40,173 beneficiaries were female, or approximately 48 percent. In addition, the New Entrants to Work Program (NEW) aims to have women make up 50 percent of those enrolled in the program for soft skills training and on-the-job training. By the end of 2013, it is expected that half of those who enrolled and successfully completed the soft skills training will be young women; by August 2014, it is expected that half of those who successfully complete the on-the-job training will be young women.

Under the *Social Promotion and Protection Project* (Bank approval: May 17, 2013; Closing: December 31, 2018), grants for income-generating activities will be provided to vulnerable groups in Lebanon, especially those with female heads of households. Women will also be a part of the target groups for social services provided through the project. Women would be particularly encouraged to participate in the "Local Consultative Platforms" (LCP), informal community structures where representatives of civil society, local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and municipal services could exchange ideas and formulate suggestions for the Ministry of Social Affairs for community-driven projects. Out of the total number of direct beneficiaries, the project will aim to have 50 percent be women.

<http://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2013/10/03/undertake-critical-reforms-to-improve-lebanon-8217-s-fiscal-stability-create-employment-provide-adequate-infrastructure-and-support-social-inclusion>

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

UN General Assembly passes landmark declaration to stop rape in conflict - 113 countries commit

The stately UN General Assembly Conference Room was packed yesterday as diplomats, government officials, women's rights advocates, and other members of civil society gathered to mark the introduction of a new pledge to end rape in war: "The Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict."

The work of United Kingdom Foreign Secretary William Hague, the Declaration offered an opportunity for UN member states to redouble their efforts to address gender-based violence in conflict. As Secretary Hague gavelled the proceedings to order, declaring this "a moment of great hope for the future," he announced that 107 countries had signed on to the Declaration--a number that continued to increase throughout the two and a half hour session. By the end of the meeting, an astounding 113 countries agreed to support the Declaration. This means that more than half of the UN member states have expressed support for



strengthened efforts to end rape in war. As the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Zainab Bangura said, "When the history books are written, they will say that this is the date, time, and place when countries came together to stop this crime."

http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/10_13/10_07/100713_general.htm

Women's safety & security in cities, in habitats

The United Nations designated the first Monday of October every year as World Habitat Day. The purpose of World Habitat Day is to reflect on the state of our towns and cities and the basic right of all to adequate shelter. The theme of this year's World Habitat Day is Urban Mobility.

Huairou Commission - *A message from HC Chair Jan Peterson*

For women to be empowered and able to thrive, they must be able to move. People talk about mobility, but they're not talking about women's mobility. At the individual level, when we talk about women's mobility, we're talking about being able to drive a car or go out at night, to be able to carry their goods to the market to earn a livelihood without fear of being robbed or attacked, to be able to swim to safety in a flood or tsunami.

At the community level, improving the social fabric of where they live is vital for women to be able to move safely. Women first fought to be able to feel safe in the privacy of their homes, and now they're working to make public space safe for women.

http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/10_13/10_07/100713_women's.htm

UNRWA deplors violence affecting camp for Palestine refugees in Syria

Palestinian refugees in Syria



The UN agency which works with Palestine refugees (UNRWA) has condemned recent violence in a refugee camp in southern Syria which reportedly claimed several lives and damaged facilities.

UNRWA issued a statement on Monday saying initial reports indicate the Dera'a refugee camp was directly affected by intense fighting on Saturday which allegedly killed seven Palestine refugees and injured 15 others.

The camp's Primary Health Care Centre and Women's Programme Centre also sustained heavy damage, according to the statement. The UN agency repeated its call on all parties in Syria to desist from conducting armed conflict in Palestine refugee camps and other civilian areas.

Despite extreme challenges, UNRWA said it continues to support more than 400,000 Palestine refugees in Syria with health care, primary education, food assistance and other humanitarian services.

Dianne Penn, United Nations.

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/english/2013/10/unrwa-deplores-violence-affecting-camp-for-palestine-refugees-in-syria/>

Why development must tackle gender-based violence

WASHINGTON—At a World Bank panel on development and gender-based violence, Indira Jaising, one of India's leading lawyers, was blunt. "Violence keeps women poor," she said.

The costs associated with gender-based violence, like the scale of the problem itself, are indeed staggering—in both individual suffering and lost productivity and earnings. And that creates unique obstacles to tackling poverty in many of the world's poorest, most vulnerable countries.

<http://www.trust.org/item/20131013183644-bikt2/>



Sudanese women: you can beat us but you cannot break us

Amira Osman is awaiting trial for refusing to cover her hair. She is one of thousands of Sudanese women who are being arrested under Sudan's criminal code, sentenced, and publicly lashed.

"I am a Muslim woman but I will not cover my head, a piece of cloth should not determine my spirituality" - Amira Osman.

<http://www.wluml.org/news/sudanese-women-you-can-beat-us-you-cannot-break-us>

GENDER & HUMAN RIGHTS

In a rebuttal to Minister Charbel, the Nationality Campaign reiterates its commitment to defend the rights of Lebanese women



My Nationality is a Right for me and my Family Campaign issued a statement last Saturday as a rebuttal to an interview given by the Minister of Interior, Marwan Charbel, to the An Nahar newspaper regarding the recent naturalization decree number 10214.

The rebuttal refers to the Campaign's earlier press communiqué concerning the said naturalization decree of 10214 (signed on March 22nd 2013) and points out that the Campaign finds itself obligated to respond to the statement and arguments of the Minister, as they are by and large inaccurate

and poorly convincing also given the Minister's suspicions about the intentions of the Nationality Campaign. The rebuttal goes on by saying that the Minister's positions were totally unfair vis-à-vis women who are demanding to be equal to men in their right to transmit nationality to their families and to enjoy full citizenship rights.

<http://crt-da.org.lb/node/14690>

International Day of the Girl Child: UN urges 'innovating for girls' education'

Girls attend class in Za'atari, the world's second-largest refugee camp. Photo: UNICEF/Shehzad Noorani



11 October 2013 - Marking International Day of the Girl Child, senior United Nations officials today highlighted the power of innovation to get more girls in classrooms and improve the quality of learning for all children.

"To achieve meaningful results, we need fresh solutions to girls' education challenges and we must heed the voices of young people," Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in his message for the International Day.

An estimated 31 million primary school aged girls currently miss out on school, according to the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) which is leading the UN system's activities marking the Day.

"Empowering girls, ensuring their human rights and addressing the discrimination and violence they face are essential to progress for the whole human family," Mr. Ban noted.

The International Day of the Girl Child was designated as 11 October by a resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2011, to recognize girls' rights and highlight the unique challenges girls face worldwide. This year focuses on "innovating for girls' education."

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=46248#.Ul1PazXn9dg>

International Day of Rural Women 15 October

"Empowering rural women is crucial for ending hunger and poverty. By denying women rights and opportunities, we deny their children and societies a better future. This is why the United Nations recently launched a program to empower rural women and enhance food security."



The first International Day of Rural Women was observed on 15 October 2008. This new international day, established by the General Assembly in its resolution 62/136 of 18 December 2007, recognizes "the critical role and contribution of rural women, including indigenous women, in enhancing agricultural and rural development, improving food security and eradicating rural poverty."

Rural women play a critical role in the rural economies of both developed and developing countries. In most parts of the developing world they participate in crop production and livestock care, provide food, water and fuel for their families, and engage in off-farm activities to diversify their families' livelihoods. In addition, they carry out vital functions in caring for children, older persons and the sick.

<http://www.un.org/en/events/ruralwomenday/>

TURKEY - Lift of generations-old ban on Islamic headscarf



ANKARA – Turkey lifted a ban on women wearing the Islamic head scarf in state institutions on Tuesday, ending a generations-old restriction as part of a package of reforms the government says are meant to improve democracy.

The ban, whose roots date back almost 90 years to the early days of the Turkish Republic, has kept many women from joining the public work force, but secularists see its abolition as evidence of the government pushing an Islamic agenda.

http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/10_13/10_07/100713_turkey.htm

No Hijab, No Job Vacancy? Variables



During an interview at a Kuwaiti government school, Asmath Choudhary, a middle-aged lady from Bangladesh who was trying for the position of a cleaner was very nervous. "It's my first time that I was going to attend any kind of interview. I have never been to school. I can't speak English or Arabic and don't understand both the languages. But, I wanted this job badly. I have three young school-going children". Arabic knowledge was crucial, especially since the post was in an Arabic school but the authorities were willing to overlook it on one condition; that she wears a hijab at work.

http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/10_13/10_07/100713_no.htm



CEDAW Committee - Considerations for General Recommendations on Rural Women

On the occasion of its 56th session, in Geneva from 30 September to 18 October 2013, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women held a general discussion on rural women (article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women). The aim of the half-day general discussion was to commence the Committee's process of elaborating a "General Recommendation on rural women". The purpose of the general recommendation is to provide appropriate and authoritative guidance to States Parties on the measures to be adopted to ensure full compliance with their obligations to protect, respect and fulfil the rights of rural women.

http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/10_13/10_07/100713_cedaw.htm

RESOURCES & CALLS

BOOKS & REPORTS

Interactions: real-time research on the empowerment of women and girls

Eldis has joined forces with IDS and global partners to support a collaborative research programme - "Influencing Policies to Support the Empowerment of Women and Girls" - by creating Eldis Interactions - a new online resource featuring real-time research and analysis from the programme. The website features updates and outputs from the research, including evidence reports as well as photo slideshows, case studies and country profiles.

The main aim of the research is to examine how to build an enabling environment for the empowerment of women and girls. Specifically, the research is split into three main areas: Gender-based violence - Urbanisation and health - Unpaid care

<http://www.eldis.org/go/latest-news/news/interactions-real-time-research-on-the-empowerment-of-women-and-girls#.Ul96gjXn9dg>

Getting At The Roots: Reintegrating Human Rights & Gender Equality In Post-2015 Development Agenda

The following paper was submitted by AWID to the UNICEF/UN Women Global Thematic Consultation on post-2015 agenda "Addressing Inequalities" (October 2012)

By Mayra Moro-Coco and Natalie Raaber:

This paper aims to contribute to debates on addressing root causes of inequalities, including gender inequality, within the post-2015 development process. It examines shortfalls in past development policy and practice, and implications of that experience for the post-2015 development agenda. An integrated and systematic gender perspective and strong political commitment to women's rights must be central parts of any new development framework. Rather than jumping to discussions of goals, this paper proposes deeper exploration of key considerations for grounding the post-2015 framework in the goals reflected in existing human rights instruments and agreements. As an initial contribution, AWID offers some general recommendations that we believe are critical for long-term, sustainable, inclusive and just development for all.

<http://www.awid.org/Library/Getting-at-the-roots-Reintegrating-human-rights-gender-equality-in-post-2015-development-agenda>



AWID Launches Women's Rights and Transitions to Democracy: An Annotated Bibliography

The launch of AWID's Online Resource Women's Rights and Transitions to Democracy: An Annotated Bibliography!

This bibliography is a result of resource mapping and other aspects of AWID's work to facilitate cross-regional experience sharing and strategizing in support of women's rights in transitions to democracy in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. It is significantly informed by the 2012 AWID Forum strategic pre-meeting on "Women's Rights in Transitions to Democracy: Achieving Rights, Resisting Backlash".

The publication provides bibliographic information and short summaries of resources which succinctly identify the contextual changes and challenges facing women in particular transitional moments, as well as clearly delineates the ways in which women's rights activists sought to confront those challenges and what lessons were learned. Navigating the website is easy as content has been classified in six main thematic categories to assist readers in identifying those that are most relevant for their work.

<http://www.awid.org/News-Analysis/Announcements2/AWID-Launches-Women-s-Rights-and-Transitions-to-Democracy-An-Annotated-Bibliography>

Launch of new gender and social movements resource

Across the world there are active social movements demanding an end to gendered injustice in all domains of our social, economic, political and cultural lives. But activists still encounter strong resistance to changing gendered politics and practices within movements and allied organizations. This new website from our colleagues at BRIDGE marks the culmination of their latest Cutting Edge Programme on Gender and Social Movements. Over the last three years, this collaborative and innovative programme has been working to inspire and help build more effective, gender-just social movements that are better equipped to create positive transformation and equality for all.

<http://socialmovements.bridge.ids.ac.uk/start-here/overview-report-and-brief-bulletin>

Equal Pay - An introductory guide

Ensuring that the work done by women and men is valued fairly and ending pay discrimination is essential to achieving gender equality. However, pay inequality continues to persist and gender pay gaps in some instances have stagnated or even increased.

http://www.ilo.org/global/standards/information-resources-and-publications/publications/WCMS_216695/lang--en/index.htm

Global competition: End gender discrimination now!

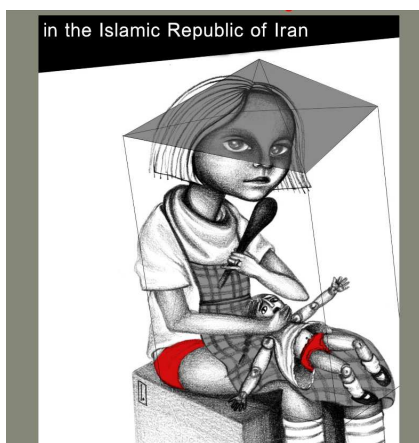


Deadline extended to November 1st

Gender at Work, the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), BRIDGE, and the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO) are working together on a global competition: End Gender Discrimination Now!

In the Arab region, one group is developing a soap opera that will challenge negative stereotypes about men and women; in a Latin American country, they're challenging gender discrimination by challenging priorities in the country's budget. Click on the link above to find out about how to submit your best examples and your most inspiring ideas!

<http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/>



Iran: Child Brides in Iran

To mark the United Nations 'International Day of the Girl Child', Justice for Iran (JFI), an NGO based in London, UK, has released a report titled "Stolen Lives, Empty Classrooms: Child Brides in Iran".

The full report may be read here <http://justiceforiran.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/JFI-Girl-Marriage-in-Iran-EN.pdf>

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